

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

chronicler who could speak of Dante Alighieri as "our neighbour," was among the victims at Florence ; the Laura of Petrarca's poetical homage at Avignon ; Ambrogio Lorenzetti, the supreme painter of allegory, at Siena. In Italy, the scourge did not rage everywhere with equal violence ; Milan and other cities near the Alps suffered comparatively little; Florence and Siena endured its worst horrors. For the five months during which it devastated these two cities, from April or May till the beginning or end of September, all civic life was suspended, and about four-fifths of the population perished. Peculiarly appalling is the account given by the Sienese chronicler, Agnolo di Tura. Men and women felt the fatal swelling, and suddenly, while they spoke, fell dead. All natural and religious bonds seemed annihilated. Without any ecclesiastical ceremony, the abandoned dead were thrown indiscriminately into great trenches hastily dug in different parts of the city, and roughly covered up with a little earth to keep them from the dogs. "And I, Agnolo di Tura, called Grasso, buried five of my sons in one trench with my own hands." Men said that the end of the world had come. Bernardo Tolomei, the founder of the Olivetani, came down with his white-robed monks from the security of secluded Monte Oliveto, to labour among the sufferers in the streets of Siena and the other Tuscan cities, and, with many of his brethren, died in the work. He had fewer imitators in his own city than among the Florentines. Matteo Villani, who took up his brother's pen, tells us that at Florence many who devoted their lives to the service of the plague-stricken either escaped entirely, or, if they took the infection, recovered, and their example encouraged others to similar charitable effort. To him it seemed like a second universal deluge, sent as a divine punishment for the sins of men.¹ It is, indeed, in some

¹ Matteo Villani, i. I, 2 ; *Cronica Sanese*, coll. 123, 124; *Il PoRstore (Rer. It. Script., xxiv.)*, cap. 32 ; *Croaica di P'ua*, coll. 1020, 1021. The statements of contemporaries that 80,000 persons died in Siena, and 96,000 in Florence— incredibly appalling though they seem—are probably more or less accurate. During the decade preceding the pestilence, the population of Florence was between 120,000 and 125,000. The survivors numbered not more than 30,000. In 1351, the population of Florence was still under 50,000, Cf. N. Rodolico?

